
MRS. PICKETT'S CHAPERONE
 By George Haskell

It was getting to be a joke in their set that Mrs. Pickett, the gay widow, kept her young niece for a chaperone. True, Helen Bryan, who had come to live with her aunt, was more quiet in manner and less given to gorgeous apparel, but it was not in the least her intention to keep an eye on her relative, whom she believed entirely capable of taking care of herself and whose brilliant conversation and witty repartee was as much a delight to her as to any of Mrs. Pickett's admirers.

Helen's conversational gift took a slightly different trend. She had also a ready wit, but she had, too, sentiment and imagination. Her poems were beginning to find their way into the best magazines and she often found reading and study more alluring than bridge parties or teas. So sometimes when they asked Mrs. Pickett where her chaperone was she would laugh and say she was being shockingly neglected and who could tell where such carelessness would end. People who only met Helen in company with her aunt never really knew the girl, for Mrs. Pickett was the dominant individual who took the conversational field and kept it. Not that she meant to do this, but she was simply bubbling with wit and good humor and had to effervesce. Naturally Helen did not, under these circumstances, shine.

About six months after Helen came to live with her aunt Wade Barber came out of the west with his pictures. He had some letters of introduction to "good people," and these, together with a prepossessing appearance and a well-bred manner, established him in social circles. He gave an exhibition of his pictures, which were really good, and sold some. Mrs. Pickett invited him to call, and very soon he was paying

assiduous attention to the witty widow.

"She must be all of 15 years older than he is," said Mrs. Catt. "Why, he doesn't look a day over 25."

"My dear," put in Mrs. Spaniel. "He must be near 30; and Ethel Pickett can't be a day over 40. Besides, men of brains, poets and artists never think about age; it's the mind and soul that appeals to them."

"Any way," purred the other, "no one these days makes any account



He Recognized Her and Waited

of the woman being older than the man. I suppose, too, it would be a pretty good thing for Wade Barber. He's as poor as a church mouse, I hear; and Mrs. Pickett has plenty of money."

"He was speaking of Helen Bryan the other day to Miss Flint and I heard her tell him the niece was a 'poor relation'."